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## NOTES ON THE COMMUNIST HORIZON AS AN IMMANENT OUTSIDE

PHILOFICTION COMMUNISM, IMMANENT OUTSIDE, JODI DEAN, MARK FISHER

Distinct thoughts are coalescing after last night's now-embarrassing waste of energy on Twitter arguments. I always regret fanning the flames with so much oxygen the morning after and, obviously, it would only be worse to delete it later.

*A very important side note from the Caves: "weaponise inattention".*

There was a point made, however — a mention of which is not intended as a provocation towards further pointless discussion; I'm not going to address it any further in any hellthreads — that Fisher and Dean both expressed a belief in the piety of party politics and so my own frequent and/or recent use of their work towards a politics of fragmentation is bad. The response I would give to this is useful only because I think it opens out onto a bunch of tandem debates, and one in particular witnessed in private channels which likewise speaks to some of the broader misunderstandings directed at U/ACC and Nyx's G/ACC blackpaper.

The first thing to be said for Mark, of course, is that he was cunning with his exposures. More so than most. He wanted to publish *Acid Communism* with Verso because he wanted to be read by as many people as possible. Given a platform, he wanted to effect change, and he wanted to do this by smuggling the long trajectory of his thought — from the Ccru onwards, which he carried with him more or less in tact — into contemporaneous, popular and public debates. This is a tactic to which many might respond with cynicism but Mark was more than skilled enough to do it right.

He demonstrated this on many occasions, writing various essays for thinktanks and policy groups but, as has been explored on this blog countless times, to totalize his thinking around this late orbit of party politics nonetheless remains disingenuous. That's the project that Jeremy Gilbert has taken upon himself with his deeply embarrassing "Acid Corbynism".

Mark may have had a singular vision but he nonetheless sought to let it proliferate through innumerable cunning guises. I cannot proclaim to be any good at this myself, although it's a thought to hold on to and likewise keep in mind as we proceed here.

On Jodi Dean, the related suggestion is that her book *The Communist Horizon* is a rallying cry for the reformation of a communist universalism and that my suggestion that she might be patchwoke is ridiculous. I do not think this is the case, primarily because to equate party politics with the totalism of a state politics is a misstep. Her universalism is, I'd argue, one of a folded inside and

outside — and this is distinct from a reformed unitary totalisation of classic Marxism.

Revisiting other scattered essays by Dean, I came across an essay on the Paris Commune called “Commune, Party, State” in which she writes about the consistent problem of a “people divided” which haunts all attempts at a Marxist universalism. She writes:

Insofar as the people precede the state, analysis of the Commune event necessarily opens up to the people's subjectification and to the political process of which the people are the subject. And insofar as the people politicized are people divided, a part of a constitutively open and incomplete set, the place from which the people are understood is necessarily partisan. The question of the party precedes the question of the state. Until we pose the party as a possibility, discussions of the state — of whether or not we should target or seize the state — are nothing more than fantasies that cloak failure as a choice: *it's not that we couldn't take power; we just didn't want to.*

She continues:

Instead of solving a political problem, the Commune poses one: the sovereignty of the people. Is it possible and what forms can it take? The non-all character of the people has been a consistent sticking point in democratic theory. If the people are not a unity, how can they rule themselves? How can they speak or legislate? And how do we know? The theoretical discussions take place under various headings — foundations, constituent power, and the possibility of bringing something new into being.

She then goes on to address Marx's initial argument for universality:

The revolutionary class gives its ideas “the form of universality” and represents these ideas “as the only rational, universally valid ones.” Marx explains, “The class making revolution emerges at the outset simply because it is opposed to a class not as a class but as a representative of the whole of society.” This is the sense in which class struggle is a political struggle. Rather than determined within the economic conditions in which class confronts class as two distinct forces with particular interests, the class making revolution represents its interests as general over and against the particular will of the oppressing class.

Communicative capitalism presents such an argument with a whole range of new problems in that the universal representation of the will of a society is exploited by social media and intensified through echo chambers, making the reality of the problem of the people all too traumatic when the necessary illusion of Leftist universality is revealed, most often at the polls, to be a lie. Preempting this somewhat, Dean addresses the imperfect reality of what otherwise resembles a sound Marxist strategy:

Marxist theory doesn't escape the problem of the people. Whether as the limits of working class struggle in trade union consciousness, the failure of the masses to revolt, or the betrayal of elitist, authoritarian vanguard parties, Marxist theory and communist movement run up against the disorganized, disagreeable, divided people. The people resist and evade the very forms on which their political subjectivity depends. When it appears, which isn't often, the movement for the majority isn't necessarily in the immediate interest of the majority. Since they can never be fully present, no revolution or revolutionary movement can actually be that of the people. It will always entail the imposition of the ideas of some upon the many.

Without wanting to succumb to too close a reading of Dean's essay — I have too much ground to cover and too little time — I will jump to her conclusion in which she writes that what is required for a revolutionary party politics is a more nuanced proposition of political *form*, and we should be clear that a form is not the same as totality. Form is appearance, not the thing in itself. As such, I think Dean's communism is useful to a patchwork thinking that does not (immediately) equate party with state-government-in-waiting and is attuned to the necessarily fragmented politics of gender, race, et al. that classical Marxism has often failed to account for. (I'm reminded here of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* which I've been reading a bit of lately.)

Patchwork, in this way, is a new form given to what Dean calls “the challenge of responding to the opening the active crowd produces, in the consequences of the gap effected by the crowd for organizing the people.” And so, as Dean's essay concludes, echoing further arguments made by patchwork bloggers:

At stake is not the specificity of a form of government, municipal or national. Nor is it a matter of the legitimacy of elections, representatives, or decisions. Instead it concerns the movement from class, to people, to party, the movement at stake in politicization. The stakes of this movement, moreover, are not those of substitution, vanguardism, or domination — they are arrangements of intensity, courage, and will. The relation of the people to the party is a question of organization in the context of those who might steer the people against themselves, making them a means of a revolution not their own.

The last glimpse of such a moment was undoubtedly the Occupy protests and the Arab Spring and the other events that defined the early 2010s. As such, the final chapter of Dean's 2012 book, *The Communist Horizon*, is filled with hope for the prospects of Occupy. However, this is an optimism that essays such as “Communicative Capitalism and Class Struggle” partially repudiate and adapt.

Yes, Occupy and the Arab Spring did suggest a revitalisation of collective action which the left had seemingly lost sight of, but what she later goes on to address is the way that this collective action was ultimately impotent precisely because of capitalism's capture of communications technologies, originally heralded as revolutionary tools but later understood as missed opportunities that have only extended the reach of capitalism's apparatuses of capture. What we were witnessing was not a new localism or a new attempt at creating a totalising force against an oppressive Big Other — which, if that was initially the case, has since failed — but the dynamics of a global class struggle; of fragmentary oppositional struggles unfolding at different speeds and intensities.

As such, many of the issues with Dean's 2012 book echo those of Jameson's Marxism, previously discussed and framed as now somewhat outdated due to their lack of relevance the current form that capitalism has taken, but her concept of a "Communist horizon" still holds water and in much the same way that Jameson's "cognitive mapping" does, so long as you don't give it a one-dimensional reading that seems stuck in the previous decade(s).

Dean defines her concept of a "communist horizon" as follows:

I use "horizon" not to recall a forgotten future but to designate a dimension of experience that we can never lose, even if, lost in a fog or focused on our feet, we fail to see it. The horizon is Real in the sense of *impossible* — we can never reach it — and in the sense of *actual* (Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real includes both these senses). The horizon shapes our setting. We can lose our bearings, but the horizon is a necessary dimension of our actuality. Whether the effect of a singularity or the meeting of earth and sky, the horizon is the fundamental division establishing where we are.

This "fundamental division" that establishes where we are echoes the practical usage of Jameson's biopolitical mindfulness, but what it is most important to emphasise here, I think, is the way in which she frames the communist horizon as a "dimension of experience".

The Outside that Dean is implicitly describing is precisely the kind of immanent Outside that Nyx's describes in her G/ACC blackpaper. To see this horizon as a tool for subsuming the outside into a totalizing framework is the worst of readings. Just as Nyx writes that it is "the logic of gender to subsume the Outside into a binarist framework that de-legitimizes the Outside", the same can be said of a political thought which treats a totalizing thought as a unitary thought and I do not think this is what Dean is doing in framing the horizon in this way.

The horizon is not a lack but a productive void, if we treat it right.

The great line demarcating outside from inside assigns interiority to time and exteriority to the non-time of eternity via a spatial horizon. A definitionally *beautiful* misconception of the topology of time, but a misconception nonetheless. [via]

This thinking about an immanent outside was discussed recently in the Caves, via Anna Greenspan's PhD thesis which some cave-dwellers are working their way through. Amy offered a quote from her essay "The Alien Inside" as a way to clarify how Greenspan's idea of an immanent outside functions in philosophy.

Just as this blog has sought to articulate, on occasion, a communist ontology of difference, Amy speaks to the communist horizon as a "dimension of experience" when she writes that each "human subject of experience is understood as carrying an irreducible exteriority at its heart, an obscure motor that processes all experience, determining yet indeterminable — the immanent abstraction of temporal succession grasped as a personal (yet universal) alien interloper." What is this if not a horizon — the form of which is determined as much by the interiority of your immediate location and perspective as it is by any exteriority. If this sounds familiar, it's because I'm written a number of times about Bataille and Blanchot — my two main dudes — explicitly referring to this "irreducible exteriority" at the heart of experience as a *form* of communism.

Just as Fisher writes of the "inside as a folding of the outside", the immanent outside of communism's horizon becomes a form of seeing where we are, a cognitive mapping that is not Cartesian but *immanent* to its surroundings. Amy again:

Our problem is not the externalised difference of the inhuman outsider — the dissimulating alien, the duplicitous fairy, the illegal immigrant, the all-too-human machine, whatever name one gives it (it wants nothing more than for you to name it) — it is our inability to grasp the illusion of integrality in the first place. If we refuse to rid ourselves of the narcissistic compulsion to draw the contours of difference from an illusory model of identity and, correspondingly, to fear difference, a construction roughly equating 'intrinsic humanity' could indeed be thrown up.

Just as capitalism, so writes Marcuse, has given itself a "biological foundation", we may find that the disruption of our supposedly "intrinsic humanity" unsettles far more than we might have bargained for, such is Nyx's argument that the dissolution of the unitary subject into a feminized zero will occasion fateful consequences for patriarchy and nation-state.

taken from here

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